1 *Vietnam Battles*

Part One

DANGER *forward*

The Magazine Of The Big Red One, Vietnam

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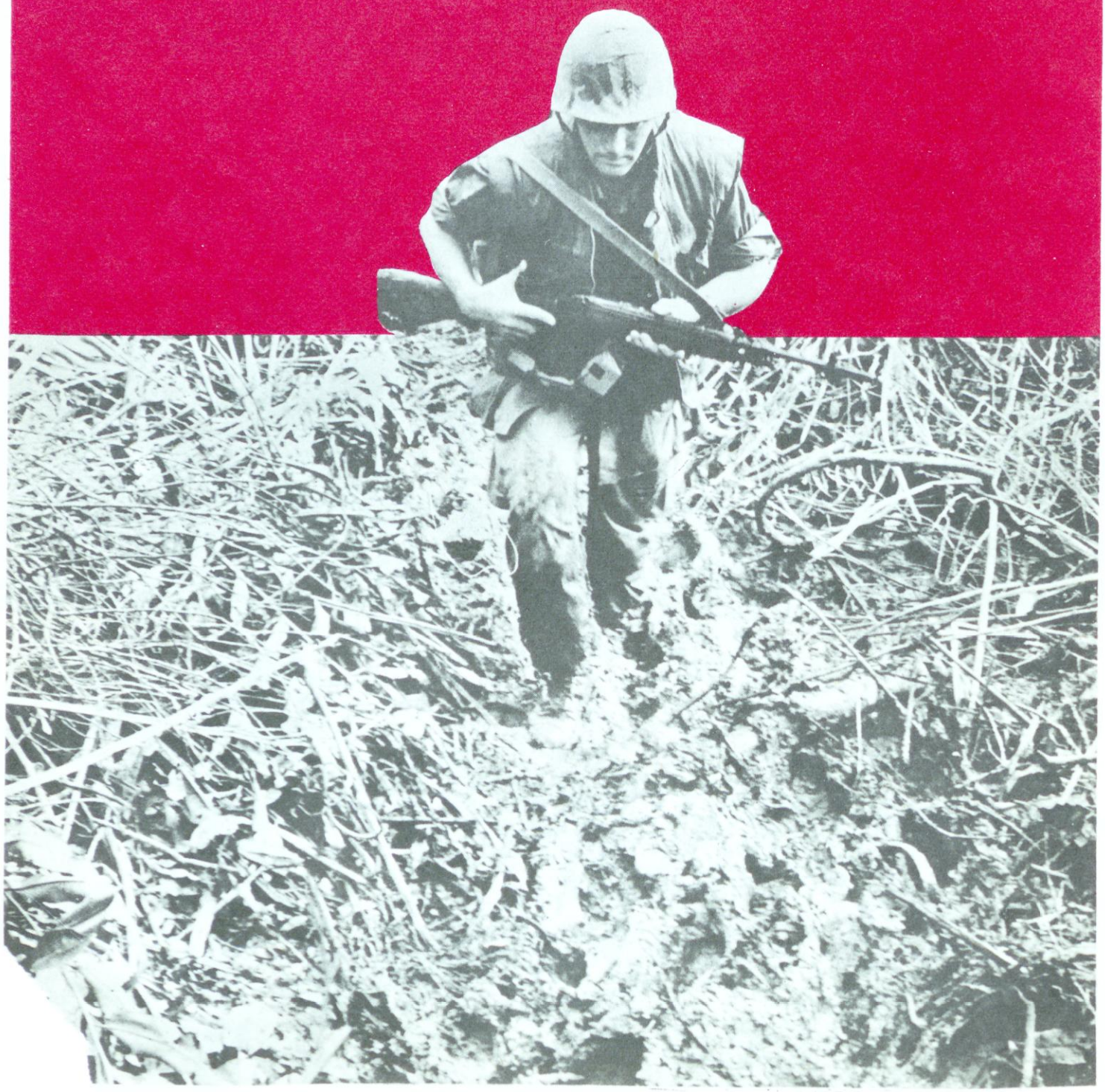
« Our number one weapon is still the individual soldier armed with a rifle he knows how to use. »

General Earl G. Wheeler



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DANGER forward

The Magazine Of The Big Red One, Vietnam

First Infantry Division
APO San Francisco 96345

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About the cover: (Front) Men of 1/26 Inf in hot LZ on Operation Attleboro, Nov 66. (Back) A « montage » of combat photos. Design by SP4 Brooks Harrison. Shown below, the cover as it appeared before being printed.

DANGER FORWARD is a unique journalistic endeavor to provide detailed information of professional interest about the Army's oldest and most respected division and how it is meeting the challenge of war in Vietnam. Articles or suggestions on topics for the magazine are invited.

Appropriately, this initial issue features capsule accounts of the first seven major battles fought by the Big Red One in Vietnam. A future edition will summarize action in nine more recent engagements.

Captain Jimmie E. Wilson, Editor

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DANGER FORWARD, an authorized publication of the US Army, provides timely, authoritative information of professional interest on combat operations, revolutionary development programs and combat support procedures of the First Infantry Division, Vietnam. It serves as a means of expression for views of the Commanding General and achieves command information objectives of the Department of the Army and the First Infantry Division. Material of interest to Division members and the Army in general is invited and should be mailed to: Editor, DANGER FORWARD, Information Office, First Infantry Division, APO 96345. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Department of the Army. Narratives, photos and statistics are approved by MACV Office of Information. The magazine is printed at Kim Lai An Quan, Saigon. The title, DANGER FORWARD, is copyrighted by the Society of the First Division.

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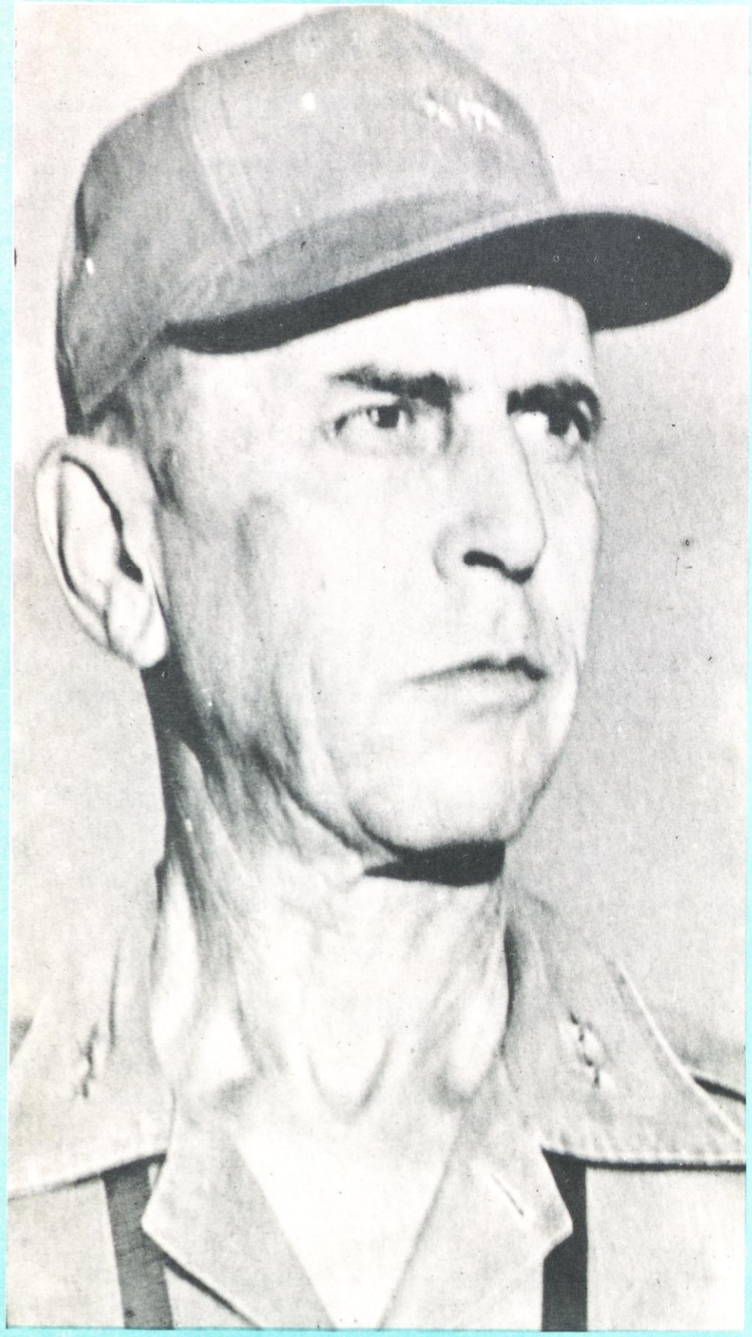
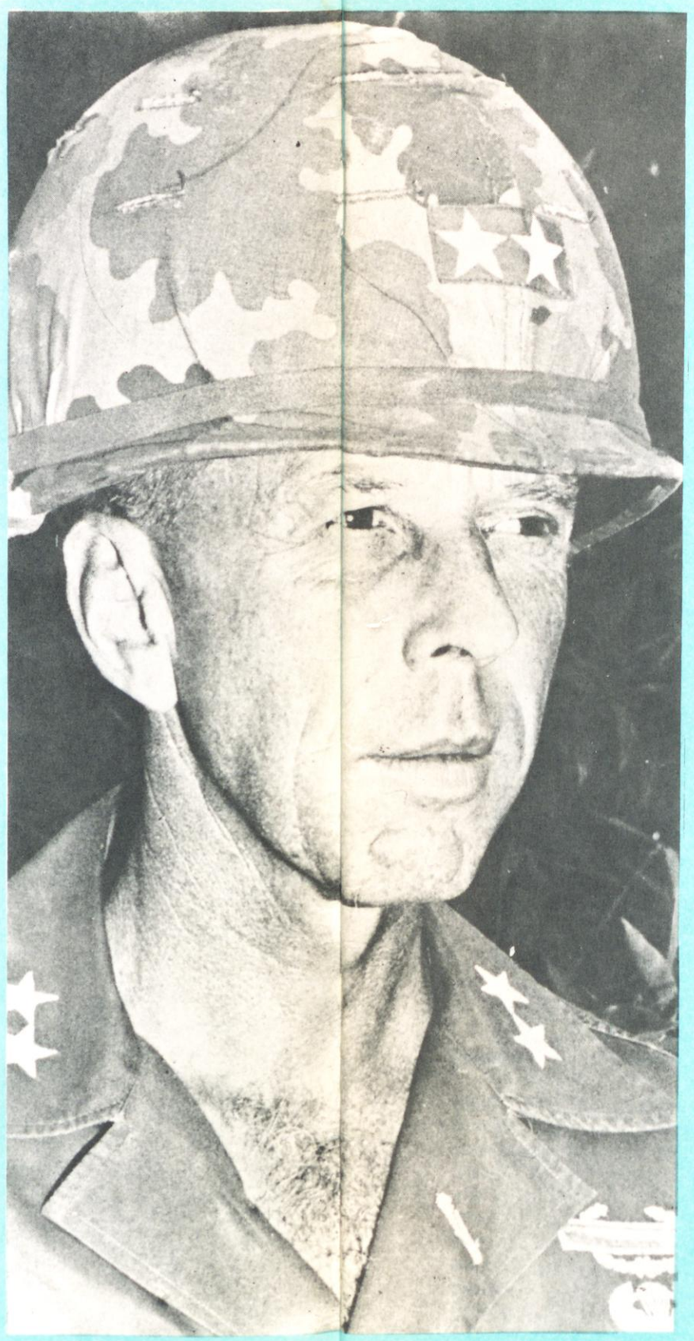
DIVISION COMMANDERS



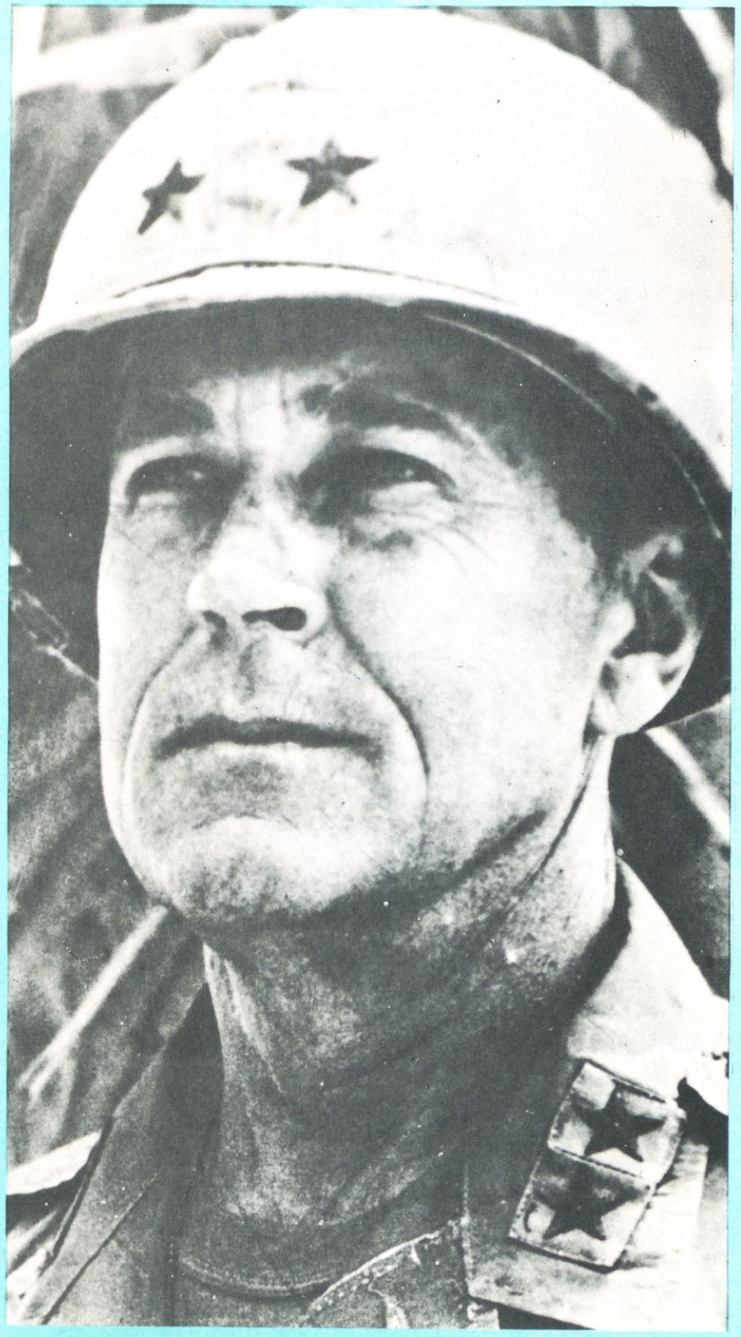
Major General J. O. Seaman*

January 1964 — March 1966



Major Genera W. E. DePuy

March 1966 — February 1967



Major General J. H. Hay

February 1967 —

* Promoted to LTG on 1 Sep 66.

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Vietnam Battles—1

AP bau BANG

THE BATTLE OF AP BAU BANG came little more than a month after the main body of the First Infantry Division arrived in the Republic of Vietnam. It was the Big Red One's first big fight.

At 1558 hours on 11 Nov 65, all company-size units in or attached to the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry were ordered to assume defensive positions for the night. Responding to the order, they made what constituted one more small but crucial move on the military chessboard of Vietnam.

The mission of the 2/2 Inf — assigned during Operation Road Runner in support of Operation Bushmaster — was to sweep and secure National Highway 13 from Lai Khe north to Bau Bang on 11, 12, and 13 Nov. The mission's purpose: to permit the safe passage of the 7th Regiment, 5th ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Division.

And thus, as evening began on that dusty Nov day and the last ARVN unit had passed, the three rifle companies and the reconnaissance platoon of the battalion, A Troop of the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry (attached), and C Battery of the 2d Battalion, 33d Artillery (which moved north with the 2/2 Inf in order to furnish additional fire support for the ARVN force's move), all began to settle into their prearranged positions. As they did so, it was decided that the position occupied by the artillery was inadequate. And so A Co, 2/2 Inf; A Trp, 1/4 Cav; the battalion command group; and C Btry, 2/33 Arty moved into a new 200-by-300-meter defensive position just south of the village of Bau Bang. (See map, Page 6.)

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Troopers of the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry watch an Air Force jet strike VC mortar positions in Ap Bau Bang

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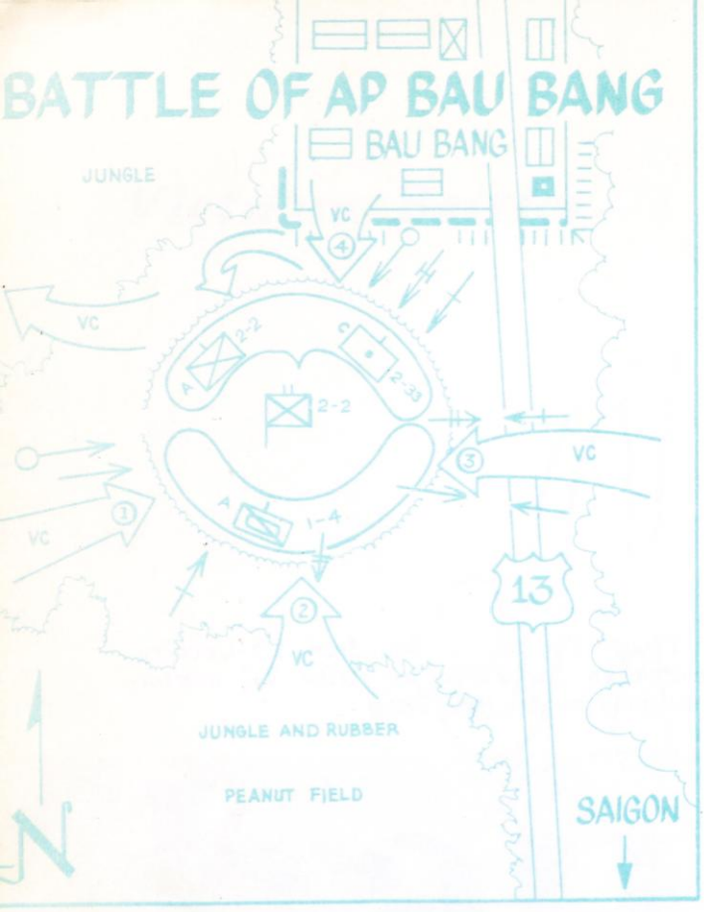

The Big Red One's first major Vietnam action began 12 Nov 65, when the VC launched mortar attack (1) followed by infantry assault (2) aimed at capturing machine guns mounted on 1/4 Cav carriers. Second ground attack (3) was repulsed by .50 caliber fire. Main VC assault (4) was supported by dug-in weapon positions in village of Bau Bang.

Key to map symbols appears on Page 32.

The rifle companies installed concertina wire, dug individual holes; and ambush patrols were moved into place.

At 2215, two mortar rounds hit to the front of the command group. At 2330, an ambush patrol from A Co, 2/2 Inf killed one VC who had discovered the patrol's initial position. The patrol found a new location and quietly passed the remainder of the night.

At 0510 on 12 Nov, all elements of the battalion task force were told to be ready by 0630 to resume their sweep-and-secure efforts along Highway 13. Fifty-five minutes later, the enemy began their attack.

A mortar barrage of approximately 50-60 mortar rounds launched from the jungle area in the southwest was joined at 0616 by a hail of automatic weapons and small arms fire.

At about 0630, the ambush patrol from A Co, 2/2 Inf was surrounded and outnumbered by almost five to one. The patrol leader decided that to get back to safety, the patrol would have to fight its way out. This it did. Sergeant Edward P. Ference of Riverside, Calif, the assistant squad leader, exposed himself with repeated daring to fierce enemy fire in order to direct his men, cover their withdrawal, and aid the wounded. When he reached the relative safety of the battalion perimeter, SGT Ference saw one of his wounded comrades lying in the midst of the advancing enemy force. He went to the man's aid and died by his side. For his heroism, SGT Ference was posthumously presented the Nation's second highest award, the Distinguished Service Cross.

The VC ground attack consisted of three efforts, in a counter-clockwise sequence.

Under the support of the hail of automatic weapons and small arms fire, there had come — from out of the jungle and rubber trees south of the perimeter and west of Highway 13 — the first VC infantry assault. Enemy infantrymen crawled through waist-high bushes of a peanut field beneath their supporting fire. A small number then charged the concertina wire in an attempt to get at the machine guns mounted on armored personnel carriers (APC's) behind the wire.

The .50 caliber machine gun mounted on the APC driven by Specialist Five (then Specialist Four) William D. Burnett of Republic, Wash., failed to function, and so SP4 Burnett moved from the cover of the driver's seat to the top of the vehicle, quickly cleared the weapon, and used it on the approaching attackers, annihilating 14 of them. During this action the carrier took three direct hits from mortar fire, disabling it and wounding the vehicle commander. SP4 Burnett assumed command, ordered the crew out of the vehicle, covered their withdrawal, and personally carried the wounded commander to protective cover moments before a mortar round landed directly on the vehicle. During the withdrawal, he also saved the life of another wounded man by using his hand weapon to eliminate two VC who were about to kill his beleaguered companion. After administering first aid to the wounded soldier, Burnett again exposed himself to a heavy volume of gunfire, going from vehicle to vehicle in search of a medical aidman for his critically injured commander. Upon finding an aidman, he led him back and then picked up his commander and carried him across 250 meters of terrain through intense hostile gun fire to the helicopter evacuation pad. For his resolute bravery and stunning compassion, SP4 Burnett was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

The next enemy assault came from the east side of Highway 13. This attack was repulsed by .50 caliber and small arms fire along the eastern portion of the perimeter. Meanwhile, during the period 0645 to 0700, an airborne forward air controller arrived with a flight of A1E Skyraiders which dropped their bombs and 20 mm cannon fire in the jungle area north of the battalion position.

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At about 0700, the enemy made its main assault from the north out of the village of Bau Bang. That village along with Ap Ben Dong So had been visited, on the two days preceeding the attack, by the Iron (3d) Brigade and 2/2 Inf civil affairs teams. They had distributed rice, beans, dry milk, clothing, CARE packages and candy. The brigade MEDCAP team had treated patients in both villages.

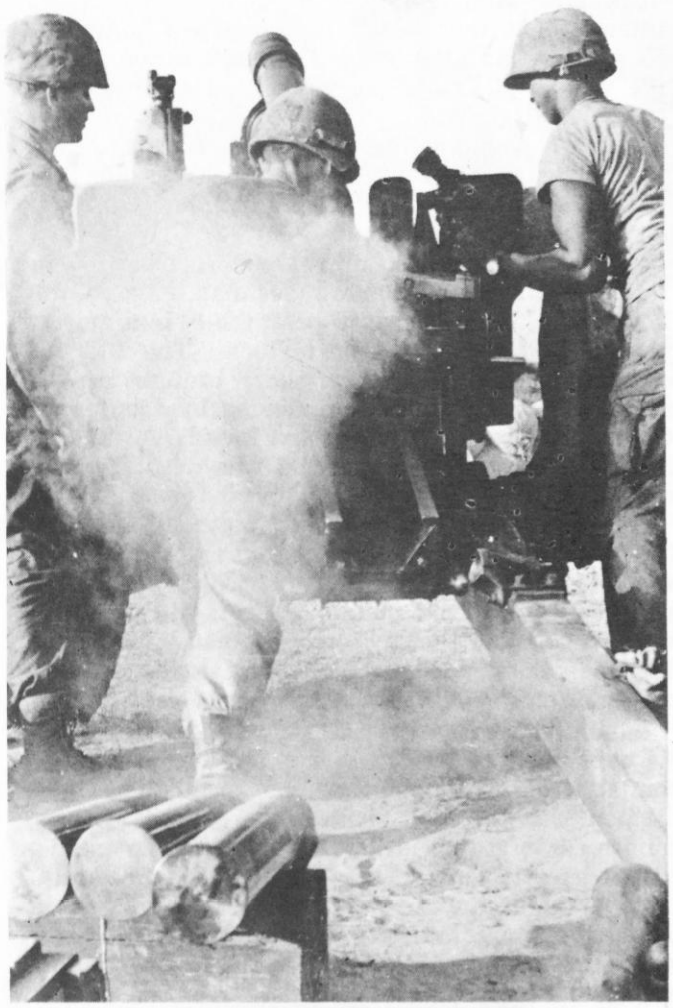
But now the VC launched their principal assault from Ap Bau Bang. Recoilless rifle and automatic weapons positions had been dug in along the berm that ran from east to west on the village's southern edge. The recoilless rifle, automatic weapons, and mortar fire provided effective support for the VC infantry assault.

The attack was met at the row of concertina wire by the combined fire of C Btry, 2/33 Arty, and the machine gun and rifle fire of A Co, 2/2 Inf. Although faced by this hailstorm of fire, one VC « suicide squad » pushed through it, penetrated the perimeter, and managed to lob a grenade into one of the howitzer positions. The attack bounced counterclockwise along the perimeter until it dissipated into the woods to the northwest.

Once it was established that the recoilless rifles were dug into the berm south of Ap Bau Bang, and that the mortars were located within the village, permission was granted to strike Ap Bau Bang. The berm was hit first by a flight of Skyraiders which used 500-pound bombs against the recoilless rifle positions. In the meantime, 22 rounds of artillery were fired directly into the berm and 40 rounds into the village.

At about 0900, the Viet Cong renewed their main attack from the village. C Btry fired 65 rounds point blank into the oncoming troops. A flight of Air Force jets dropped napalm directly on the attacking VC and the village mortar positions.

For the next three hours, the 2/2 Inf forces held their positions while artillery and air strikes pounded the enemy. At the end of the day, 198 VC bodies were found near the battalion perimeter.



Gun crews from C Btry, 2/33 Arty fired point blank into oncoming VC during one point in fierce Bau Bang fighting.

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Vietnam Battles—2

Trung Loi

THE BATTLE OF TRUNG LOI occurred in the dusk and early darkness of 20 Nov 65. In the intense fight that lasted for only two hours and 55 minutes, an attempted Viet Cong ambush near the village of Trung Loi was foiled at heavy cost to the insurgents.

After participating in Operation Bushmaster which began 10 Nov, C Company, 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry and B Battery, 2d Battalion, 33d Artillery began a return to the Iron (3d) Brigade base camp at Lai Khe by tactical motor convoy. Two rifle platoons led the convoy (see map, Page 9), followed by C Co's command post, the 81 mm mortar platoon and the third rifle platoon. The 2/28 Inf command group and the artillery brought up the rear. The convoy was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Frank R. Tims of Leoat Rapids, Iowa, 2/33 Arty commanding officer, who was with the lead elements.

At 1820 hours, the first two platoons of C Co neared the village of Trung Loi, a small hamlet some 40 miles north-northeast of Saigon. An alert sergeant in the lead platoon spotted a VC with a weapon running away from the road. He killed the Viet Cong. This incident initiated the fight, springing the VC trap before it was set.

Immediately, the first and second platoons started receiving small arms fire from the village, coming from both sides of the road. The first platoon was forced to halt. The second platoon continued to move until it reached a turn in the road where it came under a hail of machine gun crossfire from opposite sides of the road. Both platoons dismounted, formed a perimeter, and began returning fire. By this time the entire convoy was at a standstill.

A recoilless rifle opened up from the jungle on the east side of the road, firing on the mortar platoon and the company command post (CP) at 1837 hours. Another VC gun crew reached the road, but when they tried to load their weapon, the CP group killed them. At this time, mortar rounds and grenades began to hit the company CP, the mortar platoon and the battalion command group.

At 1840 hours, just 20 minutes from the time the first round was fired, a helicopter fire team arrived, making a pass from west to east, firing on both sides of the road. The fire from the helicopter was directed to force the VC onto the road. The friendly forces, personally led by LTC Tims, cut down the VC as they appeared in groups. LTC Tims was awarded the Silver Star Medal for his courage, leadership and repeated exposure to hostile fire.

During all this time, the mortar platoon was firing on the insurgents. The mortar tubes, at maximum elevation, brought rounds to within 20 or 30 meters of the road on both sides.

At 1845 hours, with darkness closing fast, a forward air control spotter plane arrived, followed by Air Force fighters. The spotter plane and fighters maneuvered overhead until 1900 hours, when a flareship arrived. The fighters immediately unleashed a barrage close to the road on the east side.

The Viet Cong attack subsided after the completion of the airstrikes and the convoy began to regroup on the road, preparing to move out.

By 2000 hours, using the light of flares, the convoy proceeded with the fighters convering their advance. Sporadic small arms fire was still being received from the village. With approval of the Vietnamese Province Chief, the forward air controller directed the fighters in an attack on the village.

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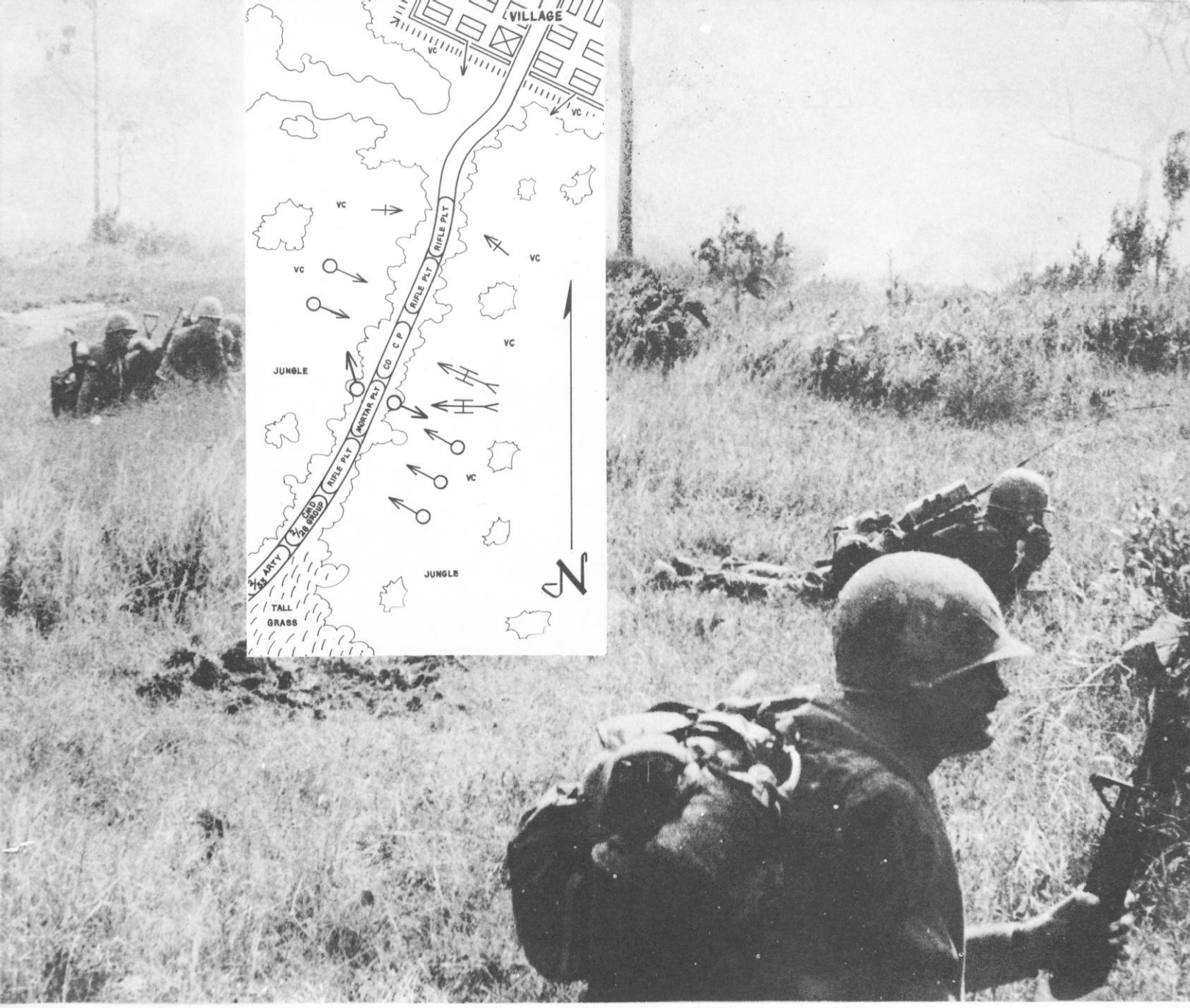

Key to map symbols appears on Page 32.

Small arms fire from Trung Loi Village and machine gun crossfire on both sides of the road caused lead platoons of C Co, 2/28th Inf to dismount vehicles and return fire. Enemy forces along the road fired mortars and recoilless rifles at the halted convoy. A helicopter fire team strafed the VC forcing them toward the road where they were cut down in groups by US mortars and small arms. After dark the Vietnamese Province Chief authorized air strikes on the village while the convoy moved past the ambush site.

While the convoy continued to move, infantrymen walked beside the vehicles, locating wounded and policing materials abandoned during the fight.

The convoy passed the attempted ambush site by 2115 hours. They reached the town of Chon Than at 2200 hours where helicopters were waiting to take the wounded to Lai Khe for treatment.

Under the light of flares, the forward air controller and the battalion commander surveyed the route for stragglers. None were sighted; however, six vehicles that had been damaged and could not be moved were left to be extracted later.

Alertness and quick action had forced the VC to initiate the Trung Loi action before they were prepared.

The battle cost the insurgents 70 dead by body count.

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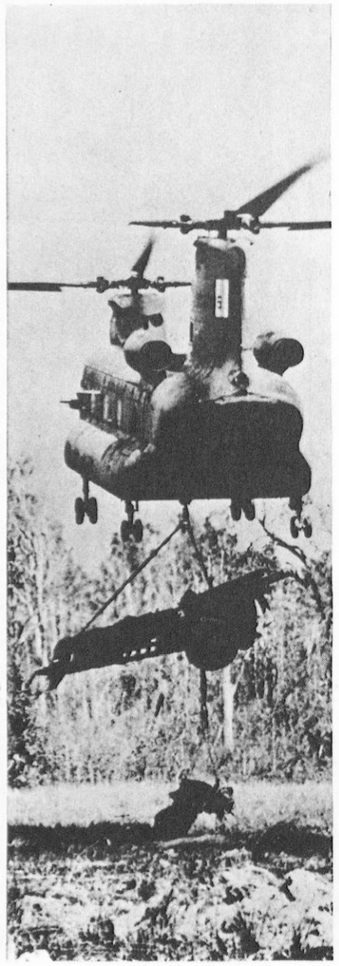

Before Ap Nha Mat Battle, a 105mm howitzer is brought by Chinook into Michelin Plantation while (far right) 2/2 Inf mortar crew blasts enemy force being pursued by 7th ARVN Regt (below).

AP NHA MAT

A 105 mm howitzer crew from the 2d Battalion, 33d Artillery fires on entrenched positions of the 272 VC Regt.

THE BATTLE OF AP NHA MAT, fought near the Michelin Rubber Plantation within five miles of where the decisive victory in the Battle of Bau Bang occurred, was the largest engagement involving Big Red One troops in 1965. The action came after seven continuous days of jungle fighting for the men of the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry. It won for them the Valorous Unit Award for extraordinary heroism displayed by the entire unit.

The action took place during Operation Bloodhound-Bushmaster II conducted by the Iron (3d) Brigade. Bloodhound-Bushmaster II began on 28 Nov 65 as a search-and-destroy operation in the heavily jungled area southeast of the Michelin Plantation located northwest of the Iron Brigade headquarters at Lai Khe.

During the opening days of the operation, a task force from the brigade, including elements of the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry ; 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry, and A Battery, 2d Battalion, 33d Artillery, was airlifted to the Michelin Platation to assist the 7th ARVN Regiment which was engaged with a large VC force.

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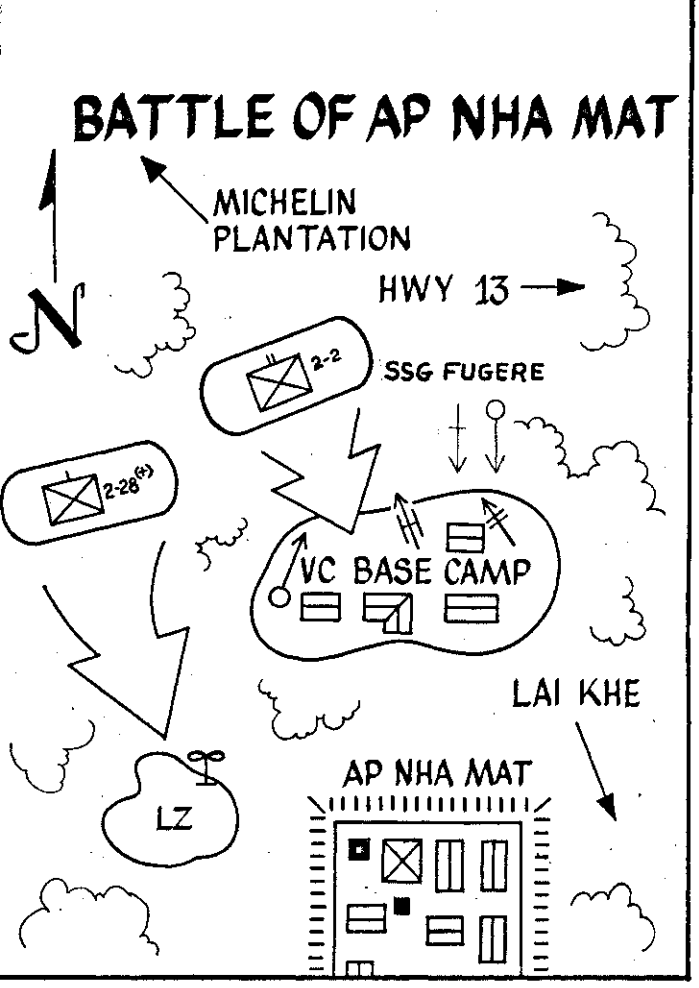

During the Ap Nha Mat Battle, the 272 VC Regt fired mortars, recoilless rifles and machine guns from fortified base camp positions at the 2/2 Inf. Air and artillery strikes forced the VC to abandon their positions and attack the US force. SSG O. J. Fugere won the DSC for leading his squad to reinforce a mortar section, personally setting up a machine gun and helping to repel three VC attacks. With air and artillery support, 2/2 Infantrymen routed the enemy, inflicting 301 VC kills.

Key to map symbols appears on Page 32.

Later the remainder of the 2/2 Inf and B Btry, 2/33 Arty were moved into the battle area. From there the brigade began search-and-destroy missions, heading southeast of the plantation. During seven days of conducting operations in the slightly rolling terrain through heavy undergrowth, the 2/2 Inf and the 1/16 Inf uncovered and destroyed numerous VC installations, including a grenade and mine factory, repair shops, tunnels and base camp complexes. The units suffered casualties from VC snipers and delaying forces.

It was during these search-and-destroy operations that the 2/2 Inf came in contact with a well-entrenched, heavily armed force of Viet Cong estimated to be four battalions. At 1230 on 5 Dec, the battle of Ap Nha Mat began.

A squad led by Staff Sergeant John L. Thibault of Lowell, Mass., was at the point and received the heaviest volume of fire. Although he was painfully wounded by the initial volley, Thibault continued to expose himself as he moved among his men, directing their fire against the VC until he was mortally wounded. Later the Silver Star was posthumously awarded to SSG Thibault.

Among others receiving the Silver Star for their heroic actions during the fierce fighting were Sergeant First Class Willie J. Wright of New Bedford, Mass.; Platoon Sergeant Honore J. Billy Jr of Chicopee Falls, Mass.; and Staff Sergeant Sammuel Vance of Atlanta, Ga. Wright received the award posthumously, having been killed while aiding one of his wounded squad leaders.

SSG Vance took charge of his platoon after his platoon leader was killed. Vance was wounded but continued to direct his platoon and adjust artillery fire and air strikes when the artillery forward observer was mortally wounded.

While moving among his men, PSG Billy noticed one man wounded and lying in an exposed position. Billy immediately exposed himself to fire to pull the injured man to safety and was painfully wounded, nevertheless, he continued to direct fire.

The VC force later proved to be the 272 Viet Cong Regiment, estimated to be 1200 strong. The VC fought from heavily fortified positions in their base camp and training area. The assaulting infantrymen were faced with mortar, recoilless rifles and .50 caliber machine guns. Large numbers of VC were positioned in trees as well as in bunkers.

Air strikes and artillery were immediately called in on the VC positions. In an attempt to escape the bombardment, the VC tried to close with the assaulting Big Red One troops.

During the fighting, Staff Sergeant Oliver J. Fugere Jr of Raymond, N. H., continually exposed himself to hostile fire while moving his squad to reinforce an embattled mortar section. After directing his squad, he personally set up a machine gun and delivered a barrage of fire into the VC. His support resulted in three VC attacks being repelled.

As hidden sniper and automatic weapons fire continued to cause casualties, SSG Fugere walked up and down a roadway to draw and detect

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enemy fire. Miraculously unharmed, he destroyed numerous sniper positions with rifle fire and grenades, including two automatic weapon positions. Four different times Fugere marked the position of his unit with smoke to guide air strikes on the enemy. SSG Fugere was later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Throughout the battle, the VC used bugles as a signal to dispense their heaviest volume of fire. After each blast on the bugle, their automatic weapons reacted with a thunderous concentration of fire. Trees in the area were cut in half by the volleys.

The air and artillery barrages and the ensuing assault by the men of the 2/2 Inf literally blew the enemy from the trees. The fierce fighting lasted for approximately two hours, with sporadic contact continuing for six hours. A reinforced company from the 2/28 Inf joined the 2/2 Inf in the area and a landing zone was secured to evacuate the wounded. Fire fights continued as the wounded were being evacuated.

Before leaving the area on 8 Dec, the 2/2 Inf made detailed sweeps of the battle site. During these searches, the battalion uncovered numerous VC materials, including rice caches, a grenade factory, and a bicycle repair shop, plus 301 VC dead.

For their heroism in the Ap Nha Mat Battle, the 2/2 Inf earned the Valorous Unit Award, equal to the Silver Star for an individual. The citation, dated 31 Oct 66, stated in part, « After seven days of jungle fighting and sustaining many casualties by the Viet Cong, the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry encountered a well-entrenched, heavily armed hostile force estimated to be four battalions in size. Upon approaching this VC element that was defending a large base camp and training area, the men of the 2d Battalion ignored the withering gun fire and showed indomitable courage as they attacked the numerically superior insurgent force. »

Troop carrying choppers of the 11th Avn Bn drop 2/2 Infantrymen into the Michelin Rubber Plantation area to begin a search mission which led to the Battle of Ap Nha Mat.

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Vietnam Battles—4

At first light, 24 Feb 66, men of B Trp, 1/4 Cav pursue battered elements of three VC battalions fleeing the 1st Bde base at Tan Binh.

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TAN Binh

THE BATTLE OF TAN BINH was a fierce engagement in which three Viet Cong battalions repeatedly threw themselves at a brigade base area in the dark, early morning hours of 24 Feb 66. The battle marked the first time that VC main forces had elected to attack a major US unit in the field in the III Corps area. The action resulted in a striking defeat for the insurgents.

At 0145 hours, the enemy forces launched their attack under the cover of heavy darkness against the 1st Brigade base located opposite a stream at Tan Binh, some seven miles south of Phuoc Vinh. The position was occupied by Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade ; elements of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry; elements of Headquarters, B and D Batteries, 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery ; B Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry ; and elements of B Company, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry. (See map, Page 19.)

At the outset of the battle, the southern and southwestern portions of the perimeter began receiving a heavy volume of small arms and mortar fire. Sporadic small arms fire was initiated against the north and northwest sides of the perimeter.

By 0215 hours, the entire perimeter was being swept with intense fire from small arms, automatic weapons, mortars, recoilless rifles and rockets. This barrage of fire did not diminish until approximately 0245 hours.

During this time, two motorized patrols were sent out of the 1/28 Inf perimeter to attempt to retrieve men assigned to listening posts.

Occupying one of the posts was a six-man patrol from B Co, 1/28 Inf led by Sergeant Dallas Collett of Springfield, Ohio. During the late evening hours of 23 Feb, the patrol had noticed a Viet Cong mortar squad moving toward the company perimeter. SGT Collett and his men daringly attacked the enemy and compelled them to withdraw. Having exposed its location, the patrol was ordered to return to the company area. While doing so, it came under intense VC fire and was surrounded by a large VC force. During the ensuing fight, three of SGT Collett's men were killed, a fourth was wounded, and SGT Collett himself sustained facial wounds when a hostile mortar round landed in the shallow trench occupied by the patrol. Despite this situation they managed to repel numerous attempts to overrun their position.

When one of the motorized patrols made an attempt to get to SGT Collett's position, an enemy recoilless rifle crew prepared to prevent the rescue. SGT Collett stood up in an exposed position, engaged the rifle crew, and killed four of its members. His heroic act allowed the armored personnel carrier to withdraw. Seventeen Viet Cong were later discovered dead near the position which had been held by SGT Collett and his men. For his persistent bravery, SGT Collett was awarded the Silver Star Medal.

Meanwhile, the other motorized patrol became immobilized by enemy recoilless rifle, mortar and automatic weapons fire.

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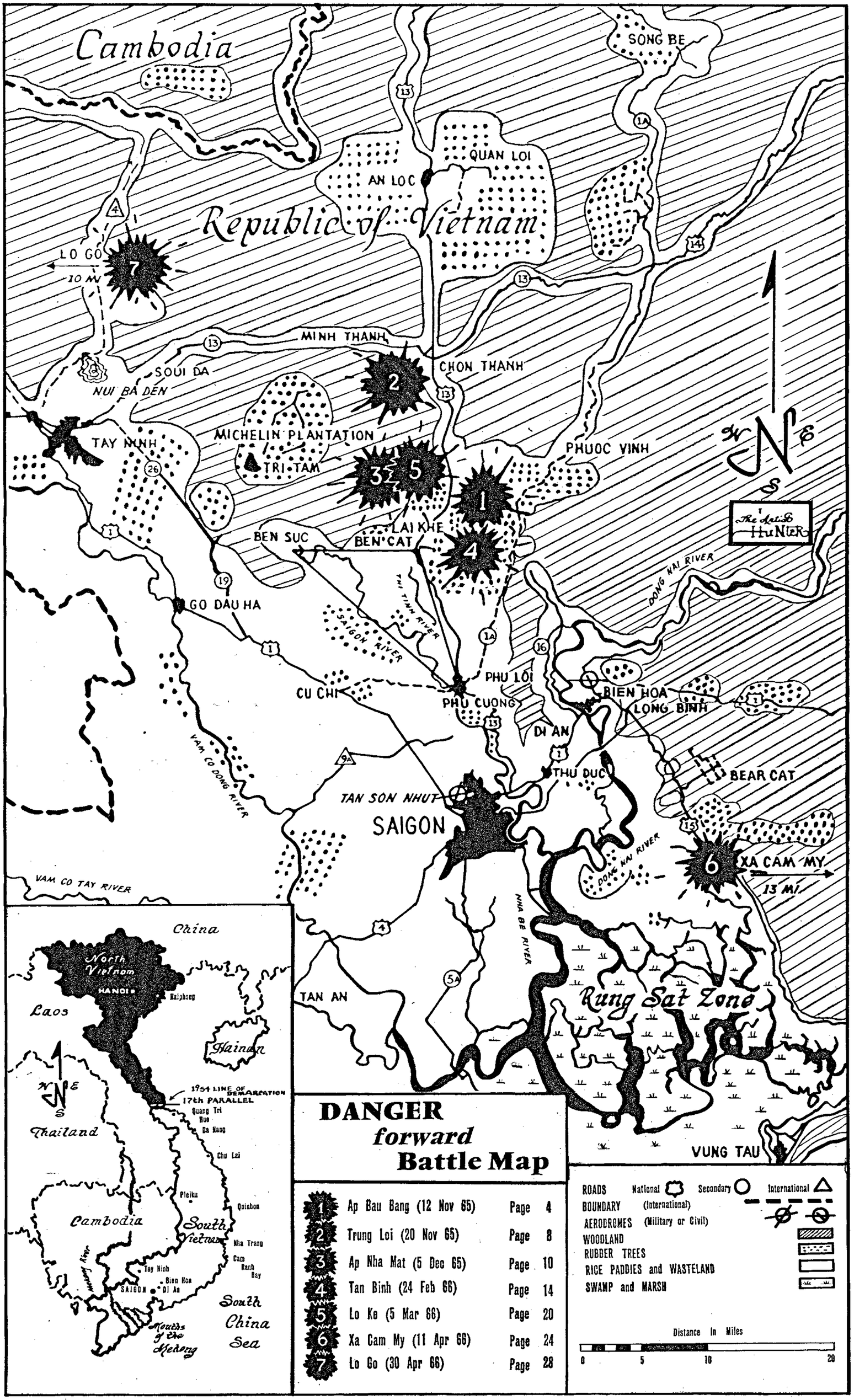

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As night begins, 23 Feb 66, a machine gun crew from the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry watches for signs of enemy movement scant hours before VC main forces launched their first attack on a major US unit in the III Corps area.

A 1/5 Arty crew continues defense of 1st Bde perimeter during Battle of Tan Binh. Because critical mortar and artillery fire would have had to be lifted to allow close air support, none was called for.

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As the BATTLE OF TAN BINH continued, the lead vehicle of the halted patrol was disabled. The scout observer, Private First Class Jeffery J. Henry of Walled Lake, Mich., removed the vehicle's .50 caliber machine gun from its mount and, exposing himself to heavy enemy fire, sprayed the enemy on both sides to cover the evacuation of the crew to the second vehicle, a tank. As he left the armored personnel carrier and approached the tank, he heard a nearby recoilless rifle crew chamber a round and he pulled his wounded tank commander to the ground. The enemy round exploded four feet away, inflicting minor wounds on both men. PFC Henry then assisted the tank commander to mount and enter the tank, where the crew of both vehicles spent the night. For his actions, PFC Henry was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by General W. C. Westmoreland, Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

The 26th Inf section of the perimeter started to receive a heavy volume of fire from all types of weapons at 0300 hours. From this time until 0430, groups of VC were seen by the light of flares in assault formations as close as 75 meters from the friendly positions. On all occasions the VC were repulsed by small arms, automatic weapons and mortar fire. The east side of the perimeter was receiving sporadic fire during this time.

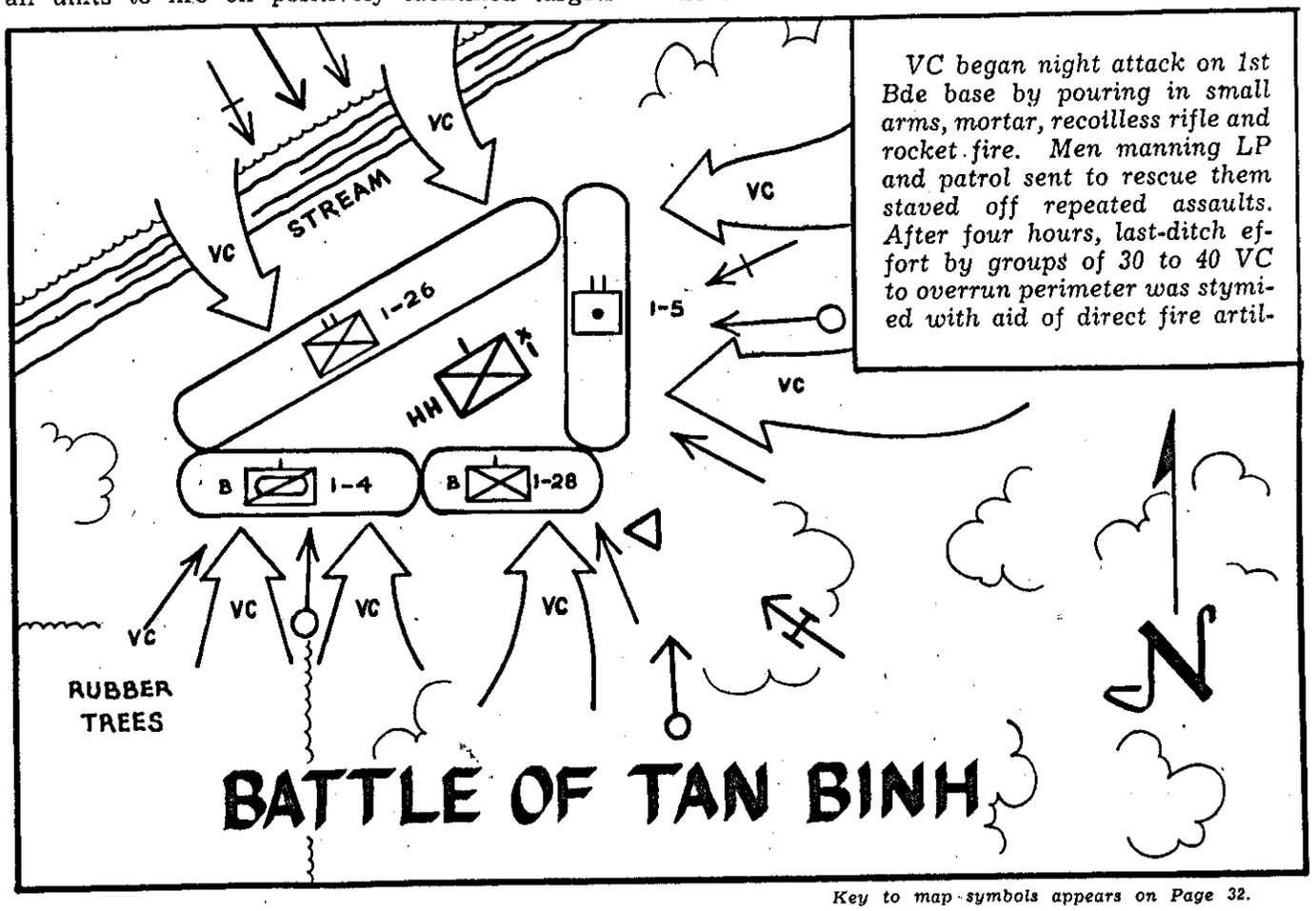
Between 0430 and 0530 hours there was a lull in the fighting. The 1st Brigade commander directed all units to fire on positively identified targets only, and to conserve ammunition in anticipation of a pre-dawn attack. Evacuation of the wounded, repositioning of personnel within the perimeter and redistribution of ammunition was accomplished.

In a final all-out effort to overrun the US lines, the VC launched an intense attack at 0530 hours. Mortar rounds landed inside the perimeter and the artillery and 26th Infantry engaged assault groups of 30 to 40 enemy soldiers, forward of their positions. Close air support was not used because it would have required the lifting of artillery and mortar fire. On several occasions, the artillery batteries lowered the barrels of their 105 mm guns to fire point blank into the oncoming VC.

The Viet Cong broke contact at 0645 hours, as the morning light revealed their positions. Search-and-destroy forces, air reconnaissance and artillery were immediately used in an attempt to locate and block the fleeing enemy.

From documents found on VC dead, three enemy battalions were identified as having been in the battle. It is believed that two additional battalions also participated in the action. The estimated strength of the Viet Cong was placed at a minimum of 1,500 and an added force of 1,000 was scheduled to take part in the battle but did not arrive.

The American forces dealt the enemy a severe blow, killing 142 VC by body count and wounding 15. The VC also lost a large number of weapons of various types, as well as a great deal of ammunition.



VC began night attack on 1st Bde base by pouring in small arms, mortar, recoilless rifle and rocket fire. Men manning LP and patrol sent to rescue them staved off repeated assaults. After four hours, last-ditch effort by groups of 30 to 40 VC to overrun perimeter was stymied with aid of direct fire artil-

Key to map symbols appears on Page 32.

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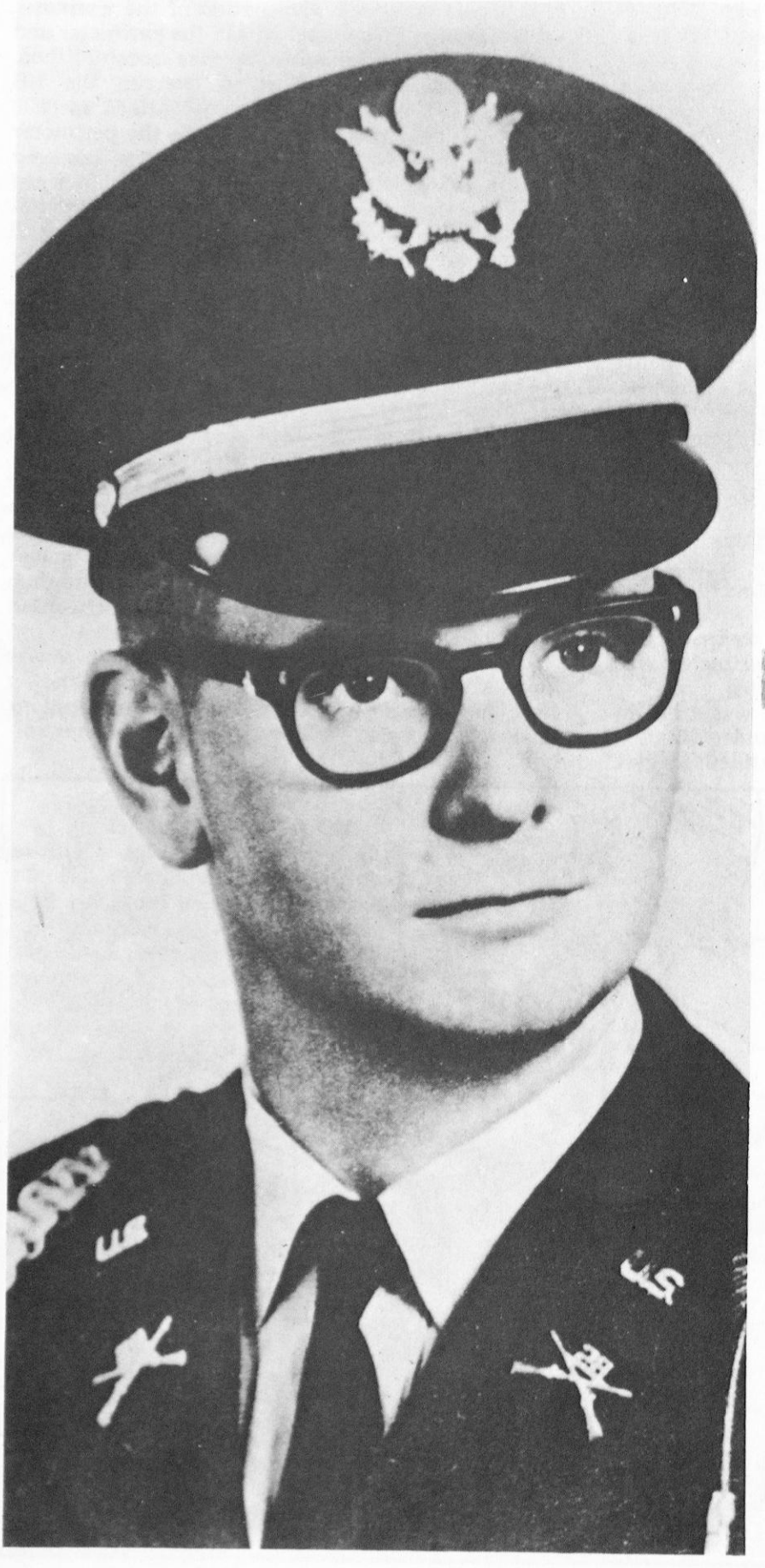
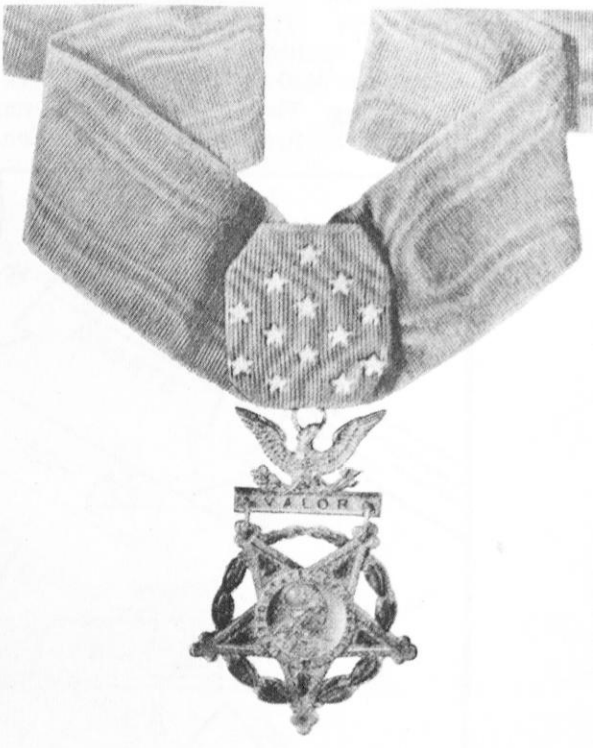
Vietnam Battles—5



Lieutenant Robert J. Hibbs

1943 - 1966

First Medal Of Honor Winner With The Division In Vietnam



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THE BATTLE OF LO KE produced the Big Red One's first Medal of Honor winner in Vietnam. Lieutenant Robert J. Hibbs of Cedar Falls, Iowa, was posthumously awarded the Nation's highest recognition for valor for his heroic actions at the outset of the battle.

During the action, large forces of Viet Cong made repeated, vicious attacks on the well-defended positions of the 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry during Operation Cocoa Beach. The VC were enticed into making the attacks on the morning of 5 Mar 66, some six miles north of the Iron (3d) Brigade's base camp at Lai Khe.

The men of the 2/28 Inf left their base camp to begin the operation on 3 Mar. The unit set up a strong perimeter, digging deep foxholes and fighting emplacements, leaving nothing exposed to enemy fire. Their position was located in the Lo Ke Rubber Plantation approximately one mile west of the village of Bau Bang.

Ambush patrols sent out on the first night reported no contact, and the next day the battalion began conducting search-and-destroy missions in the area. A Co, moving to the west, discovered a VC base camp and a small fire fight developed. Meanwhile B Co, traveling north, discovered a trench line nearly nine feet deep, running from Bau Bang to the west approximately two kilometers (1.3 mi). The trench appeared to have been used a few days earlier by a large force. This information was relayed to 3d Brigade headquarters and a fire support plan was developed, assigning the northern segment of the perimeter to air support, and the southern section to artillery fire.

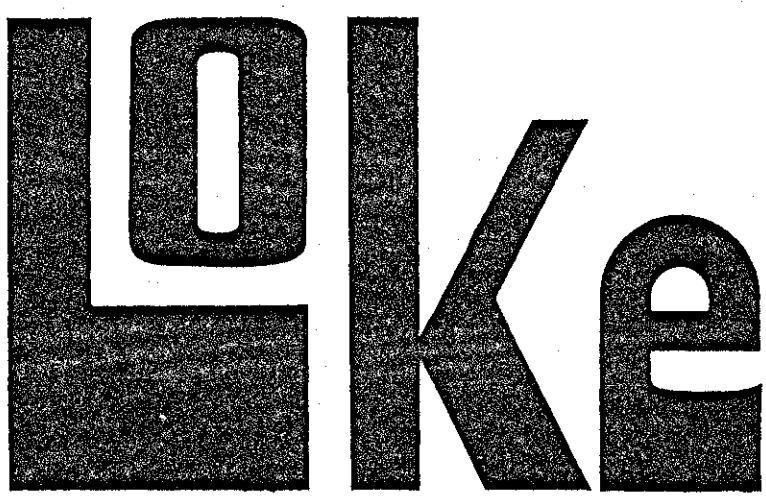
Ambush patrols were again sent out, and a four-man listening post was set up to the west. Shortly after midnight, the battalion received word that a VC force of regimental size was believed to be near Bau Bang. All company commanders were alerted and by 0530 the command tent had been taken down and all personnel were up and alert.

First contact was made by a 15-man ambush patrol led by LT Hibbs at 0545. Hibbs had positioned his men along the road to the northwest of the battalion perimeter. Just before sunrise, the patrol observed a Viet Cong company led by a man in a white robe advancing down the road toward the battalion's positions. The company was part of the VC regiment which later initiated the attack.

Using his radio, the Lieutenant alerted the command post and then prepared to delay the oncoming VC. After repositioning the patrol's anti-personnel mines for maximum effectiveness, Hibbs waited until the Viet Cong were within 20 feet before firing the mines.

The effect was devastating, killing or wounding many of the VC company. Hibbs then threw hand grenades and stepped out onto the road, opening fire on the white-robed leader of the VC force in an effort to cover the withdrawal of his patrol until they had broken contact. He then joined his men and led them back toward the battalion perimeter.

As the patrol approached their lines, they encountered the rear element of another Viet Cong company, deployed to attack the perimeter. At first the patrol thought the force was friendly so a Big Red One soldier called out, « Bravo, Bravo, Bravo.» From all around the patrol came many calls of « Bravo » with obvious Vietnamese accents, but one voice in perfect English said, « Bravo Company is over here. » LT Hibbs yelled out, « Like hell, those are VC. » Hibbs ordered his patrol to open fire and charge the VC unit. Their attack carried them through the Viet Cong, completely disrupting the enemy force.



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When the patrol reached the safety of the perimeter, the Lieutenant learned that one of his men (a Private Holloway) had been wounded and was wandering in a dazed condition between the two forces. Though wounded in the leg, Hibbs and one of his sergeants went back to retrieve the wounded man. The pair immediately came under heavy fire. As the sergeant dragged the man toward the perimeter, LT Hibbs stayed behind to provide covering fire. In an extraordinary display of courage, Hibbs advanced on two enemy machine guns with a rifle and pistol. He was mortally wounded about 20 feet in front of the guns. Before he died, Hibbs destroyed the starlight scope attached to his rifle to prevent its being captured by the VC.

While LT Hibbs' patrol was creating confusion among the VC attackers, the patrol from A Co heard a VC force moving from the west into the jungle east of Route BLUE. Before they knew it, there were VC all around them. Since it was still dark, the patrol mingled with the VC and headed back to the battalion perimeter. There was an exchange of fire with the VC. No friendly casualties resulted. The other patrols, C Co to the east and a four-man listening post to the west of Route BLUE, returned to the perimeter without contact.

After Hibbs' patrol had interrupted the VC movement, the main assault came at 0635 with a large force of Viet Cong attacking from the northwest and shifting to the northeast. In the fierce fighting that followed, the VC were engaged with everything available. Another attack coming from the west was broken up by Air Force jet fighters. The VC attacking from the north were driven into a trench and hedgerow where they received a merciless pounding from the air strikes. Air strikes were also directed into VC mortar positions set up near the plantation building to the northeast.

The VC strength appeared to be battalion size on each side of the perimeter. Desperate attacks were made on the defending infantrymen. One company reported that the bodies of the enemy dead were providing cover for many other VC.

During a lull in the fighting, a UH-1D helicopter arrived to resupply ammunition. The helicopter drew heavy fire from the enemy while it was on the ground and on take off. It crashed shortly afterward, killing all personnel on board. Continuous air strikes and artillery were placed on the enemy. One F-100 was shot down by a VC .50 caliber machine gun. The pilot ejected and was later rescued by personnel from the 2d Infantry.

About 0930, the heaviest Viet Cong attack was launched from the south. Concentrated firepower of artillery, automatic weapons, and mortars was used to break up the attack.

Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry was alerted and prepared to conduct a helicopter assault into the area. A landing zone was selected to the north of the 2/28th Inf perimeter (see map, Page 23) near Bau Bang, to cut off the VC escape route. The first lift departed Lai Khe at 0912 and by 1050, eight lifts had been completed.

The first action by 1/16 Inf was reported shortly after landing when B Co made heavy contact with a hard core force dressed in light khaki uniforms. The VC attempted to cover their withdrawal with claymore type mines but were overrun so rapidly, none were detonated. Many traces were seen of VC groups that had withdrawn through the area and a rout was evident by blood trails and discarded equipment.

By 1200, the VC were routed and small groups were attempting to escape. As the battle subsided, patrols immediately began to pursue the fleeing VC. The 1/16 Inf troops linked up with the 2/28 Inf at 1430. The infantrymen continued to search the area, receiving only light contact throughout the remainder of the day. At a point where planes had spotted and fired on an anti-aircraft position, a reconnaissance patrol found three .50 caliber machine guns and two wounded VC.

Altogether the enemy lost 199 killed. Eight VC suspects were detained.

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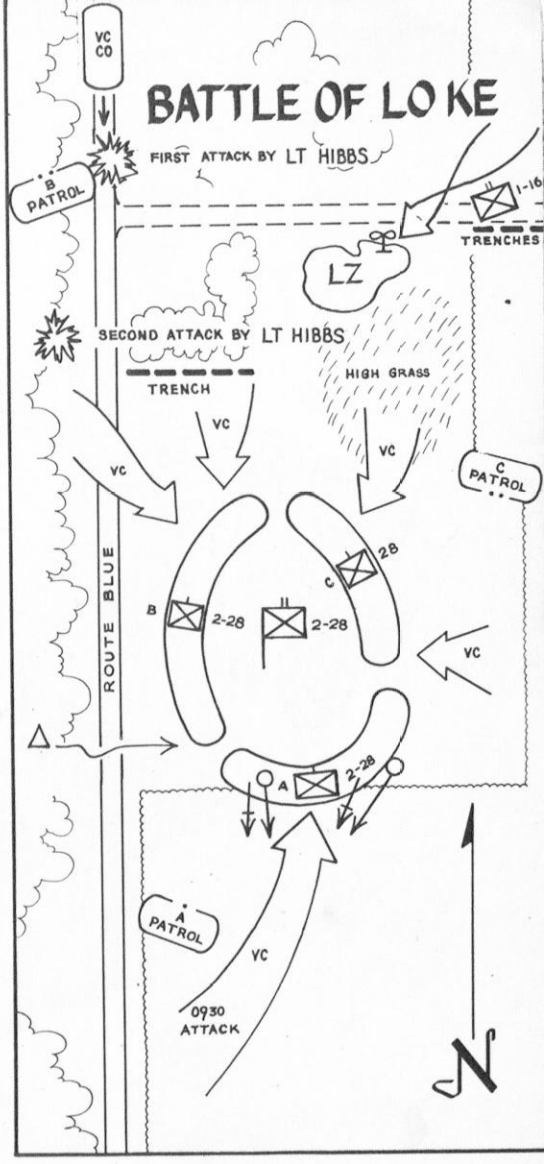
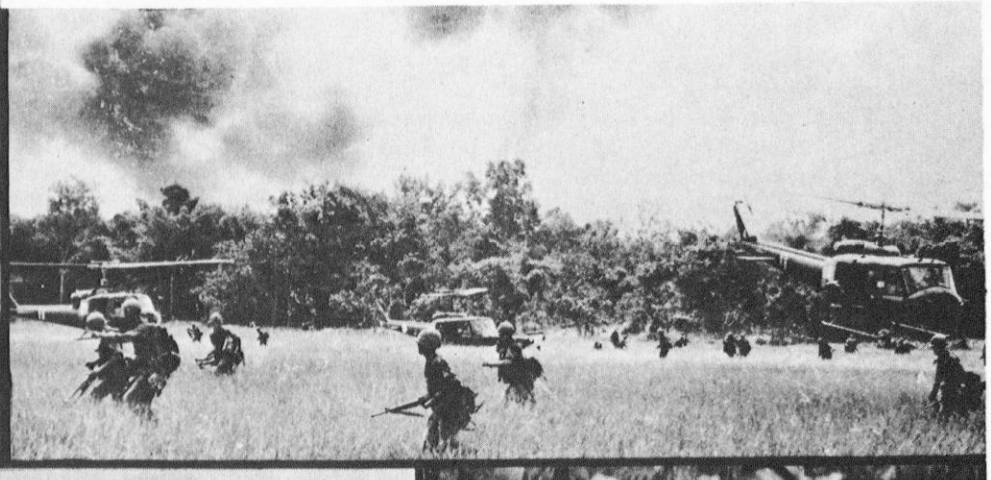


Key to map symbols appears on Page 32.

Airstrikes (left) were called in on all sides of 2/28 Inf perimeter to break up attacks of VC regt during Battle of Lo Ke. Below, a medic treats a leg wound inside the perimeter while 1/16 Infantrymen cut off enemy fleeing heavy mortar and artillery fires.

After Medal of Honor winner, LT Hibbs, and his patrol encountered two VC companies, main enemy assault came from northwest at 0635. Heaviest attack, at 0930, was launched from the south. Air strikes and withering artillery, mortar, and small arms fire held off the VC. Air assault by 1/16 Inf later took fleeing enemy by such surprise that the VC did not have time to detonate mines set up to cover their withdrawal.



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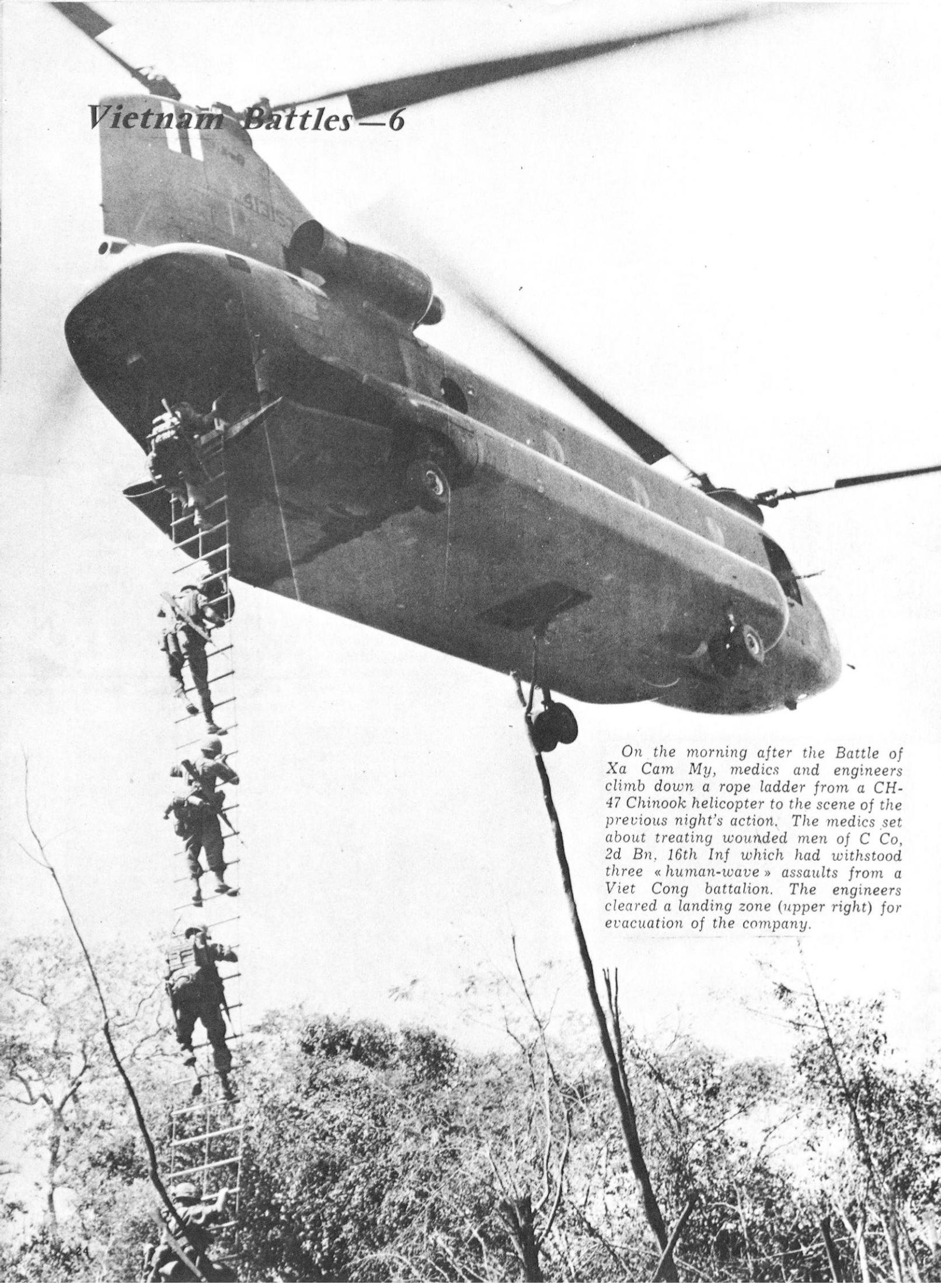
Vietnam Battles—6



On the morning after the Battle of Xa Cam My, medics and engineers climb down a rope ladder from a CH-47 Chinook helicopter to the scene of the previous night's action. The medics set about treating wounded men of C Co, 2d Bn, 16th Inf which had withstood three « human-wave » assaults from a Viet Cong battalion. The engineers cleared a landing zone (upper right) for evacuation of the company.

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XA CAM MY

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THE BATTLE OF XA CAM MY was fought in dense jungle approximately 40 miles east of Saigon. The fighting started early on the afternoon of 11 April 66, and continued after dark, as a single company of the First Infantry Division pursued an enemy platoon and later repulsed an attacking VC battalion.

As a part of Operation Abilene, C Company, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry had been conducting a search-and-destroy mission some 10 miles southeast of the town of Xa Cam My. At 1355 hours, the company discovered and brought under fire a platoon of Viet Cong, killing five of the enemy by body count.

The engagement lasted until 1525 hours, when the VC attempted to break contact by moving to the northwest, in the direction of Xa Cam My. C Co pursued the enemy, maintaining contact until the US unit stopped to treat and evacuate their wounded. Because of the extremely heavy jungle growth in the area, the unit did not realize that they had halted just 100 to 200 meters from a hidden concentration of Viet Cong.

At 1735 hours, the company began to receive a heavy barrage of mortar along with automatic weapons fire and bursts from .50 caliber machine guns. At the same time, small arms fire hit the unit from all directions. Snipers who had positioned themselves in trees, directed fire and grenades against the unit's defensive positions.

The Viet Cong initiated three fierce « human-wave » assaults on C Co. Staff Sergeant Rolf Schoolman was wounded during the first assault, but the Texan crawled among his men, distributing ammunition. When the second attack inflicted several casualties in his squad, he moved forward and fought savagely, inspiring his men. He was awarded the Silver Star Medal.

Advancing undetected on a machine gun position, Private First Class Marion Acton of Huntsville, Ala., killed the entire enemy crew. He continued his single handed assault, killing several more of the enemy, until he was killed by a sniper. The Silver Star was posthumously awarded to PFC Acton for his valor.

The Silver Star was also awarded to Sergeant First Class Charles Urconis of Nolan, W. Va. As he was maneuvering against an enemy machine gun position, the sergeant came under fire from a .50 caliber machine gun. Although he was armed with only a pistol, he attacked the .50 caliber, killing the entire crew. He continually reorganized his men during the VC assaults. During the night, Urconis received word that a lieutenant was lying severely wounded outside the company's perimeter. He crawled out to the officer, administered first aid and then returned with the man.

Another hero of the action was Sergeant James W. Robinson of Anandale, Va, a rifle platoon team leader. When a medic was wounded while aiding another wounded man, SGT Robinson

After an afternoon skirmish with an enemy platoon, C Co, 2/16 Inf pursued the enemy unit (above) into dense jungle, stopping just 100 to 200 meters from a hidden VC battalion. The company held their position throughout the night, repelling three « human-wave » assaults. The battle cost the Viet Cong 41 dead.

charged through a hail of enemy fire, dragged both men to cover and administered first aid, saving their lives. Robinson then gathered rifles and ammunition left by American dead and wounded and redistributed them. At the same time he redeployed his men.

Running to the aid of another man, Robinson was hit in the leg and shoulder. The wound disabled one arm. He continued, reached the man, and dragged him behind a tree where he saved his life by applying first aid. He spotted an enemy .50 caliber machine gun position and, although out of ammunition for his rifle, charged the gun with two hand grenades. He was hit in the leg by a tracer round which set one trouser on fire. Ripping off the burning clothing, he continued although rounds from the machine gun were being fired directly at him. Just 30 feet from the gun, he used his one good arm to throw both grenades simultaneously. When the grenades exploded the machine gun barked its last volley. SGT Robinson fell dead with two .50 caliber rounds in his chest. For his bravery, SGT Robinson has been recommended for one of the Nation's highest awards for valor.

While the fighting was going on, a continuous barrage of Division artillery fire was brought in

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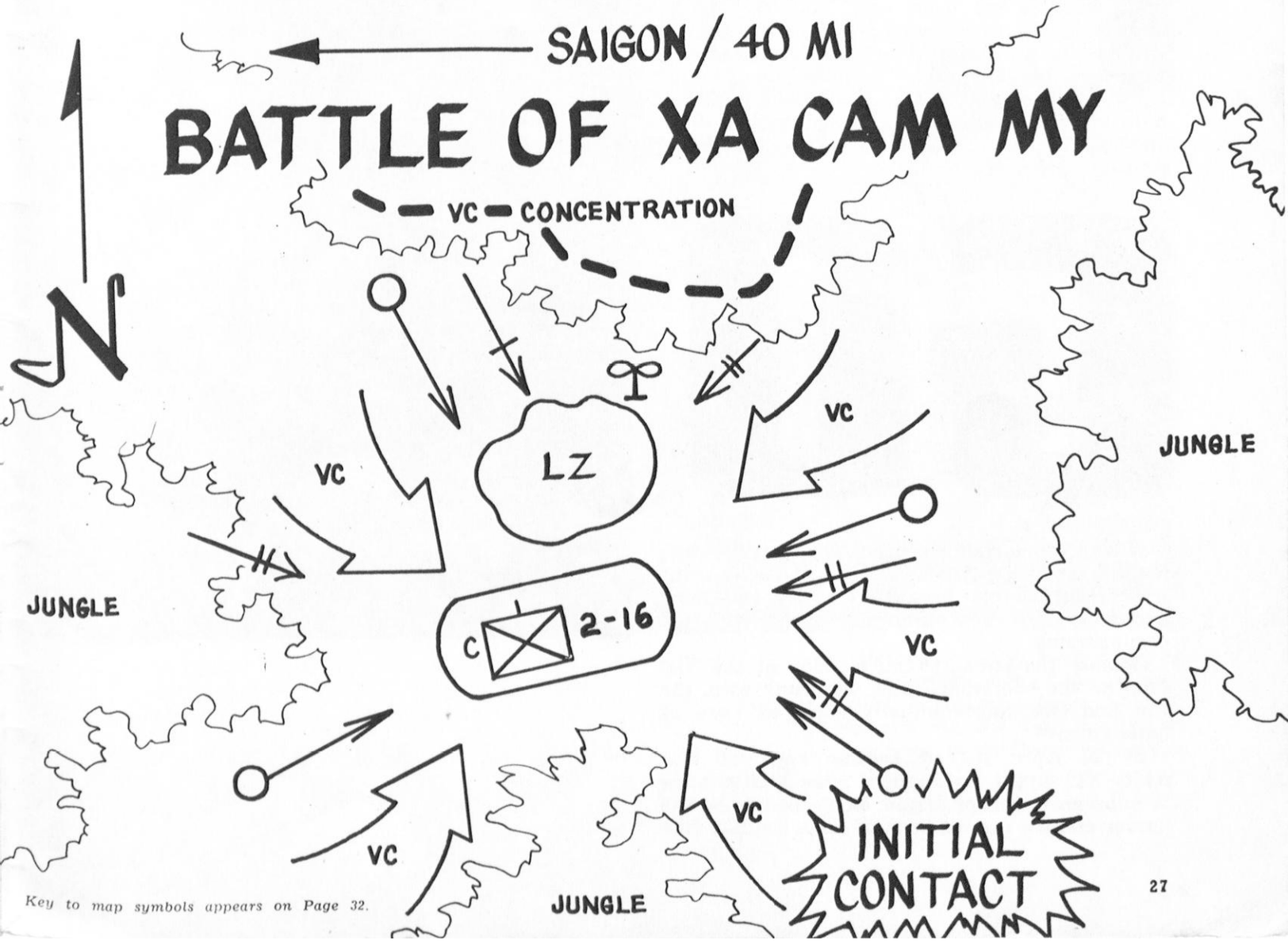
on all sides of C Co. The Viet Cong broke off the engagement at 1930 hours and the artillerymen continued firing throughout the night.

Two units that had been operating in the area had moved in to reinforce C Co during the night, but due to the artillery fire, they waited outside the unit's perimeter until the first light of 12 April.

At 0700 hours, a CH-47 Chinook helicopter brought in medical personnel to treat the wounded of C Co and a team of engineers to clear a landing zone for the evacuation of the unit. The medics and engineers climbed down a rope ladder from the helicopter to the heavy jungle.

The first helicopters landed in the battle area at 1100 hours, evacuating C Co to the 2d Brigade base camp at Bear Cat. The two reinforcing companies swept to the northeast in an attempt to regain contact with the VC battalion, as other units conducting search-and-destroy operations in the province altered their plans to search for the fleeing enemy.

The battle marked the most significant contact of Operation Abilene, as C Co defended its position and succeeded in repelling a Viet Cong unit of much greater numerical strength. The VC lost 41 killed by body count.



Key to map symbols appears on Page 32.

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LO GO

THE BATTLE OF LO GO was the First Infantry Division's heaviest engagement during Operation Birmingham.

A search-and-destroy effort, Birmingham, began on 24 April 66 and ended on 17 May 66. The 1st and 2d Brigade (reinforced) operation was launched to locate and destroy Viet Cong forces and base camps in the Province of Tay Ninh, in an area bounded on the west and north by the Cambodian border, on the south by the Song Vam Co River and Tay Ninh City, and on the east by the 40 N-S grid line.

When the operation began, the weather was hot, dry and dusty. But — April and May being transitional months between the dry and rainy seasons — the temperatures dropped with the coming rains.

Because the strength and location of the Viet Cong in the operational area were unknown, the Big Red One forces initially deployed were of battalion size.

By 26 April it had become apparent that major VC supply installations were located some 50 miles northwest of Saigon, along the Cambodian border and the eastern bank of Rach Cai Bac (the

Moving into Tay Ninh Province by helicopter, men of the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry begin a sweep north along the Cai Bac River, just prior to the Battle of Lo Go.

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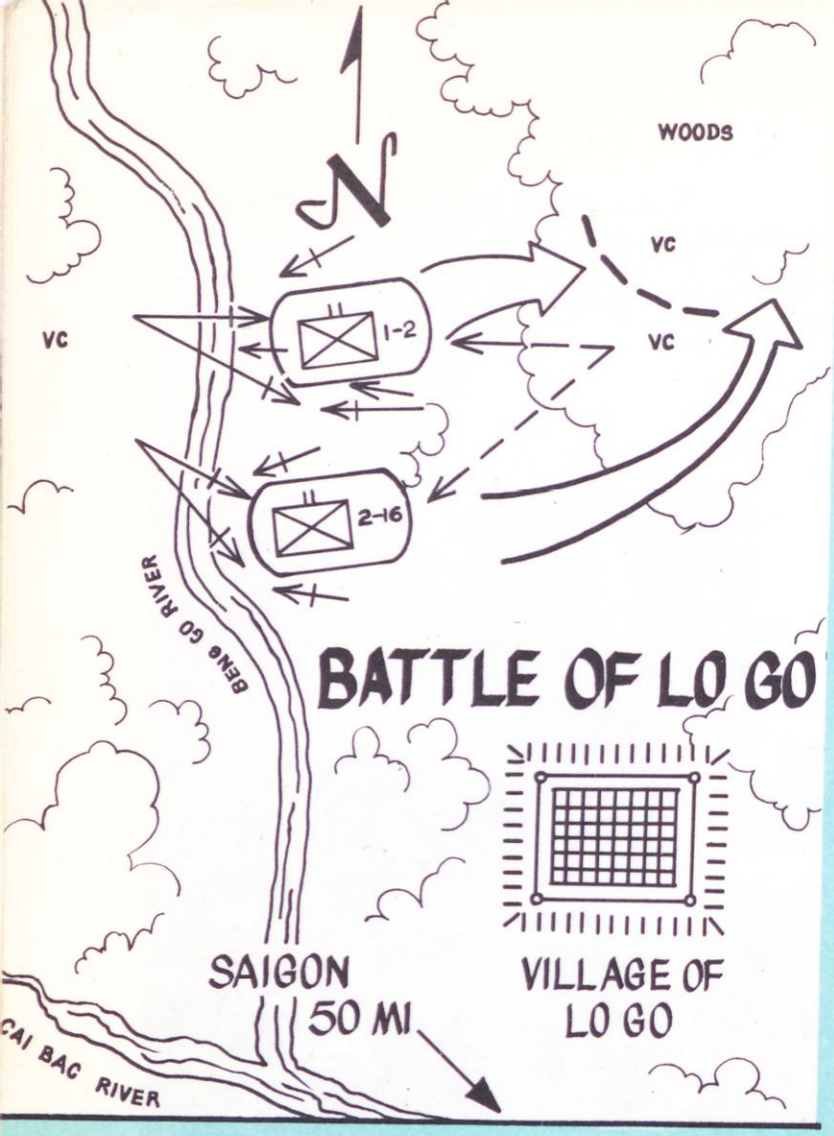

Key to map symbols appears on Page 32.

After being fired on from the west bank of the Beng Go River, 1/2 Infantrymen advanced on a VC battalion and later called in air strikes to fight out of attempted enemy encirclement. A Co, 2/16 Inf flanked other enemy force, killing eight and destroying company-size camp.

River of Cai Bac). Four battalions were deployed to the west to search the jungle areas and examine the suspicious landing sites on the river.

On 29 April the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry and the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, which were sweeping east of another river, the Beng Go, discovered a major VC hospital complex. The 2/16 Inf also located and destroyed 108 tons of rice. But there was still no significant contact.

The next day, 30 April, leaving one company of the 2/16 Inf at the hospital complex, the rest of the battalion, together with the 1/2 Inf, continued toward the village of Lo Go. At the same time, they began to receive automatic weapons fire from the western bank of the Beng Go River.

The Big Red One soldiers returned fire with small arms, automatic weapons and artillery. The automatic weapons from across the river fell silent.

Then A Company, 2/16 Inf moved eastward and succeeded in enveloping the right flank of a VC force sighted northeast of the river. Eight Viet Cong were killed and a company-size base camp was destroyed.

Meanwhile, the 1/2 Inf closed with the VC (estimated at a battalion on the east bank). During the fierce battle which followed, the American unit was compelled to fight its way out of a partial encirclement.

Major William P. Baxter of Baltimore, Md, serving as the battalion's S-3 officer, moved out in front of the heavily engaged lead company. While probing the enemy lines, his element suddenly came under devastating hostile fire. MAJ Baxter and his element grappled with the attacking VC at close quarters in the dense jungle. By means of small arms and artillery fire, his group routed the enemy force and returned to friendly lines.

When MAJ Baxter's men reached the lead company, the VC again opened fire from the front and left flanks. Air and artillery strikes were called in which, coupled with effective small arms and mortar fire, broke the back of the VC assault. For his courageous leadership, MAJ Baxter was award the Bronze Star with « V » Device for valor.

In all, the battalions killed 50 VC (body count).

Four more Viet Cong were killed by the 2/16 Inf during mop-up operations. Contact was broken at 1404 hours. The total VC losses were 54 killed by body count.

Operation Birmingham was to continue for another 17 days, but the five-hour Battle of Lo Go proved to be the operation's most significant encounter with the enemy.

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Above, men of the 2/16 Inf head for a chopper to be flown to the Lo Go area during Operation Birmingham. At right, 1/2 Inf rifleman moves under sniper fire during fierce fighting on a bank of the Beng Go River. Later, artillery (below) helped 1/2 Inf fight out of a partial encirclement.

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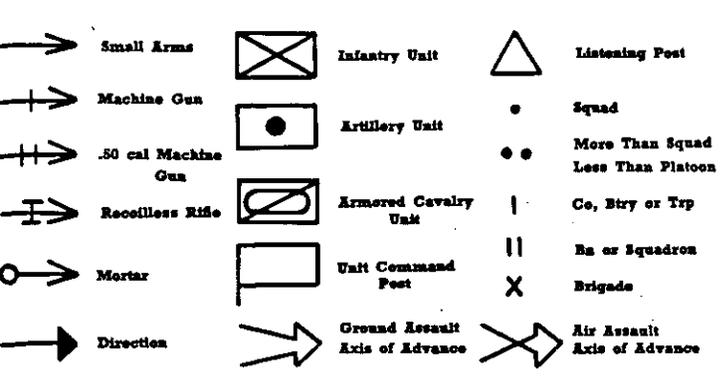
STATISTICS SUMMARY

BATTLES	UNITS INVOLVED	US COMMANDERS	ENEMY KIA*
Ap Bau Bang (12 Nov 65) *Story on Page 4*	US: A Co, 2/2 Inf; A Trp, 1/4 Cav; C Btry, 2/33 Arty VC: 271, 272, 273 Regt's; Phu Loi Bn	3d Bde — COL William D. Brodbeck 2/2 Inf — LTC George M. Shuffer Jr 2/33 Arty — LTC Frank R. Tims 1/4 Cav — LTC Paul M. Fisher	198 (BC)
Trung Loi (20 Nov 65) *Story on Page 8*	US: C Co, 2/28 Inf and Command Group; B Btry, 2/33 Arty and Command Group VC: 272 Regt	3d Bde — COL William D. Brodbeck 2/28 Inf — LTC George S. Eyster 2/33 Arty — LTC Frank R. Tims	70 (BC)
Ap Nha Mat (5 Dec 65) *Story on Page 10*	US: 2/2 Inf; 2/28 Inf VC: 272 Regt	3d Bde — COL William D. Brodbeck 2/2 Inf — LTC George M. Shuffer Jr 2/28 Inf — LTC George S. Eyster	301 (BC)
Tan Binh (24 Feb 66) *Story on Page 14*	US: HHC, 1st Bde; 1/26 Inf; 1/5 Arty; B Trp, 1/4 Cav; B Co, 1/28 Inf VC: 500 Dong Nai Bn; 1/273 Regt; 1/271 Regt	1st Bde — COL Edgar N. Glotzbach 1/26 Inf — LTC Erskine Smith 1/5 Arty — LTC Paul E. Killpack 1/4 Cav — LTC Paul M. Fisher 1/28 Inf — LTC Robert Haldane	142 (BC)
Lo Ke (5 Mar 66) *Story on Page 20*	US: 2/28 Inf; 1/16 Inf VC: 4/U80 Arty; 272 Regt	3d Bde — COL William D. Brodbeck 2/28 Inf — LTC Kyle W. Bowie 1/16 Inf — LTC Lee S. Henry	199 (BC)
Xa Cam My (11 Apr 66) *Story on Page 24*	US: C Co, 2/16 Inf VC: 1/274 Regt	2d Bde — COL Albert E. Milloy 2/16 Inf — LTC William S. Hathaway	41 (BC)
Lo Go (30 Apr. 66) *Story on Page 28*	US: 1/2 Inf; 2/16 Inf VC: 1/70 Security Guards Regt	1st Bde — COL Sidney B. Berry 2d Bde — COL Albert E. Milloy 1/2 Inf — LTC Steve F. Phillips Jr 2/16 Inf — LTC William S. Hathaway	54 (BC) * *KIA — Killed In Action, BC — Body Count*

Map Symbols



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« We have found that our young fighting men in South Vietnam are capable of and are doing a better job than their fathers did in World War II and their older brothers did in Korea. »

General Harold K. Johnson

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